

Andy Birkey, *Minnesota Independent*

A bill authored by Rep. Betty McCollum to prevent child marriage abroad was defeated in the House late last week by Republicans who said the bill might fund abortion. The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act passed the Senate unanimously early last week without Republican objection. McCollum called the GOP's efforts to kill the bill "blatant phony arguments."

The bill was created to "provide assistance, including through multilateral, nongovernmental, and faith-based organizations, to prevent the incidence of child marriage in developing countries and to promote the educational, health, economic, social, and legal empowerment of girls and women as part of the strategy established pursuant...to prevent child marriage in developing countries."

But when the bill reached the House after the Senate, Republican leaders circulated a memo urging members of the party to vote against the bill.

"The bill provides little structure or oversight on how the money may be spent," the memo read. "The President is authorized under this bill to provide assistance through nongovernmental organizations that are charged with the promotion of 'health' of girls and women. It is possible that some of these NGOs may view abortion as health care and promote abortion services as a part of that health care."

Under House rules, the bill needed a two-thirds majority to pass because the bill was fast-tracked on the chamber's suspension calendar.

All DFL members of Minnesota's congressional delegation voted for the bill, as did Republican Rep. Erik Paulsen. Reps. Michele Bachmann and John Kline voted against the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act.

McCollum was miffed at the failure of the bill which was expected to pass easily in the House. Calling the statements that the bill would fund abortions "completely untrue," she said, "The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act failed last night not because of the issue, but because a handful of Republicans chose partisan politics over the basic human rights of young girls. I am truly disappointed in this result, but I'm not giving up on these children."

She added, "Senate Democrats and Republicans didn't play partisan politics in this vote; they unanimously recognized that the United States can and should become a leader in the fight against child marriage. Had this legislation contained abortion provisions or authorized new spending, it never would have unanimously passed the Senate."